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Kyle had a few good days before we found out he was a no-good, lying, cheating, sack of you-know-what.

“*Twelve days*,” Mei cried, sprawled on my bedroom carpet like a collapsed Jenga tower. “*Right before our two-week anniversary.*”

Zoe handed her a yellow pre-strawed Capri Sun, but Mei swatted it away. She was in mourning.

“*He told me I was special*,” she wailed. “*He gave me thaaat*.”

Without even looking up, she pointed to the mood ring on top of

her peach JanSport backpack—suede bottom, obviously—an iconic middle school status symbol.

The ring’s color? Midnight black. The perfect shade of betrayal.

Matching the current mood in the room. Matching the funeral we were about to hold.

I looked at my friend, bawling her eyes out. I sighed.

Textbook Kyle.

He was in my science class. Unfortunately for his parents, the only experiment he was working on was his hair.

I once watched him spend the entire period sculpting—no, engineering—his signature flip. Globs of gel plastered into auburn strands until it defied gravity, logic, and the entire law of physics.

It was harder than cement, an architectural marvel, really—if you ignored the fumes strong enough to evacuate a small chem lab, all mixed with a toxic cloud of Axe body spray.

Kyle didn’t share notes. His class contribution was an endless supply of Wite-Out, which he passed around like contraband. He’d snicker with his boys as they

sniffed it under the table while Ms.Malone droned on about photosynthesis.

As a bonus, he was a master of stolen test answers, a legend in the art of academic laziness. He’d scribble formulas on the side of his Chuck Taylors, then, with a flick of his Wite-Out pen, erase the evidence—like a seasoned con artist.

Another day of making his mom and dad proud.

And in a cruel twist of irony, our dearest Mei—brilliant, beautiful, the artist of our class, and the girl who could belt out every Avril

Lavigne song like she wrote them herself—got herself caught up in him.

Hook, line, and sinker.

Zoe and I exchanged glances. Last week, we had suffered a twinge of jealousy when Mei returned with the mood ring—a token of twelve year old devotion.

Total proof they were a thing.

Something to twist around her finger in math class, to remind every other girl at Westwood Middle that she was taken.

At its center, a swirl of pink and orange, like a bottled sunset. The

metal band was thin, already a little tarnished, leaving behind a seaweed-green stain if you wore it in the shower.

The ring promised to reveal your innermost feelings—but mostly, it just turned black when you were cold and violet when your hands weren't. Hardly psychic.

We were all dying to have one.

"*Okay*," I said, standing. "*There's only one thing to do.*"

Mei choked on a sob. "*What?*"

I lowered my voice. "*We have to kill him.*"

Zoe nodded solemnly. She reached for her Gelly Roll pens. “*The ritual.*”

Mei wiped her eyes. “*I don’t know… this seems extreme.*”

“*He left us no choice.*”

“*Dug his own grave*,” Zoe echoed.

“*But..*”

I met her gaze. “*Mei, he gave another girl a bracelet*.”

“*From Claire’s.*”

“*Your favorite store.*”

“*He gave it to Brittany L.*”

Mei sat up slowly, the wheels finally turning. Her eyes hardened. There she was.

“*Where do we start?*”

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We flipped Mei’s JanSport backpack upside down and shook it like we were performing an exorcism. The relics of middle school survival rained down—mechanical pencils, a spiral notebook covered in doodles, butterfly clips, an empty Bubble Tape container, and an unsettling amount of stale Cheeto crumbs.

Then, I saw it. The pencil case.

The sacred vault where all things Kyle-related had been stockpiled—notes, tiny folded-up pieces of lined notebook paper, and whatever

sentimental nonsense he had bestowed upon her.

I unzipped it, bracing for impact.

The Kyle memorabilia was disappointingly large for a relationship that lasted less than two weeks. I glanced at my pastel pink Baby-G watch, it’s chunky silicon band snug around my wrist. We had a lot of work to do before Zoe’s mom summoned us for dinner, but this—this was important.

I pulled out a folded note.

Zoe read it aloud in the most monotone voice she could manage:

“hey whats up”

“nmu?”

“nm this class is boring lol ur cool”

“ur cool too”

Zoe paused. “*You two had some amazing convos,”* she said gently.

She passed the note to me—on deck, ready for demolition.

Good cop. Bad cop.

Mei reached out, “*Wait!*”

I shook my head and dramatically ripped it in half. Half of the note floated to the floor. I crumpled the other half in my palm, making a tight ball and launching a perfect

three-pointer into the trash. The sounds and sights of heartbreak around us.

Zoe patted Mei on the back. “*Sorry*,” she whispered.

“*It had to be done,*”I said.

Mei slumped back down in the corner beanbag chair, defeated.

I dug deeper, pulling out a clump of what could only be described as a “signature Kyle artifact”—an old, beat-up wristband that looked like it had once been a vivid neon color, now faded to a dull gray.

The words “LIVE, LAUGH, LOL” were etched into the rubber.

I held it up like a badge of dishonor. “*Okay, so this is actually a crime against fashion and common sense.*”

Zoe clutched her stomach, laughing. “*He sure has a way with words, doesn’t he?*”

Mei, now fully resigned to the tragedy, wiped a tear from her eye and sighed. “*I can’t believe I wore that.*”

“*It’s over now*,” I said, already gathering the mementos into a neat little pile of regret. “*Besides, soon, you’ll have new things to wear. Like, I don’t know, real*

jewelry that doesn’t change colors based on your mood.”

She smiled weakly, her gaze flickering toward the mood ring. “*Yeah… like an actual piece of silver.*”

Then came the rest—a Post-it with his home phone number. A KitKat wrapper from the time he gave her his leftovers and called her cute. A real Romeo.

Every last bit was obliterated. Shreds of paper filled the trash, burying Mei’s pile of soggy, crumpled tissues. The room felt strangely lighter as Kyle’s

existence slowly began disappearing into the ether.

Next up. The yearbook. We skipped straight to Kyle’s photo, of course.

Zoe pulled out a red Sharpie with the precision of a neurosurgeon about to perform a life-or-death operation.

“*Be gentle*,” Mei whispered.

Zoe nodded seriously. Then, with a single merciless stroke**,** she X-ed out his face. Sniper style.

His eyes vanished under a thick layer of red ink. All you could see now was his spiked hair, jutting out from between the lines.

It was time for the final execution.

We crept down the stairs like stealthy ninjas on a mission, scanning the kitchen and hallway for any signs of life. Left. Right. Clear. Zoe’s parents were nowhere to be seen.

We huddled around Mei’s family PC, shoulders practically touching, each of us squinting at the screen like we were about to defuse a bomb. The familiar hum of *The Sims* opening soundtrack filled the room as we booted it up, fingers poised over the keyboard, exchanging quiet jabs over the mouse.

Our eyes locked onto the screen, unblinking. We looked like a three-headed dragon, ready to breathe fire on our unsuspecting enemy.

The game loaded. It was time.

Step 1: Create Kyle.

- Baggy cargo jeans? Check.
- Spiky gelled hair? Check.
- Aspirations: To be the Worst? Check.

For added authenticity, we gave him a perpetual scowl and made sure his walk was as awkward as his social skills.

Step 2: Build the House.

- No doors. No windows.

- One single chair.
- A fireplace suspiciously close to the carpet.

It was going perfectly.

Step 3: Let Fate Take Its Course.

Zoe and I watched, grinning like vengeful gods, as Sim Kyle paced in confusion inside a four-by-four box—no doors, no wallpaper, no escape.

The pixelated antagonist flailed, speech bubbles popping up in desperate pleas.

Help. Sleep. Toilet.

Zoe and I bit our lips, stifling laughter. Seconds stretched into minutes.

And then—at last—Mei cracked a smile. It was small, at first, but then it grew, like the dawn breaking after a storm.

Zoe tossed us each a pack of Fruit Gushers, little gems of artificial fruit, the taste of sleepovers, school lunches, and locker chats.

On screen, the flames inches closer.

“*This feels… right*,” I managed, my words sticking together through my sugar-glued teeth.

I glanced at Mei. Her tears evaporated, replaced by something lighter. A quiet smile tugged at the corners of her lips.

And then—the Grim Reaper appeared.

Skeletal hands. A robe like shadow itself. A demon with no face, moving slowly, deliberately, sealing fate with every step.

Then—

A digital gravestone popped out of the ground.

Sim Kyle was officially gone. RIP.

We squealed, popping Gushers into our mouths and cheering. Justice was served.

Mei gave a breathless laugh, shaking her head.

“*Okay, maybe that was a bit much*,” she said.

I glanced over at Zoe and Mei, and we all broke into uncontrollable giggles. It felt like the entire room was vibrating with the sound of our laughter, the kind of laughter you can’t control once it starts.

We all sighed, a little lighter, a little freer.

“*Alright*,” Mei said, wiping her eyes, “*Let’s do it again, but this time give him pigtails.*” More laughter.

The sun started to set, casting long shadows across the room. Slowly, the light faded, leaving us in the boxy glow of the computer screen. The world outside seemed to disappear, and we were just us—together in this moment, in our own secret world.

The scent of Lip Smackers and Pacific Cooler filled the room, a perfect blend of middle school rebellion. Victory was sweet—like that last Gusher, bursting with just the right amount of sugar. For a

moment, we were unburdened, suspended in time as it stretched out before us. Everything felt exactly as it should.

Somewhere in the distance—in the future—we'd drive to meet each other, laughing over overpriced cappuccinos. We'd reminisce about the school nights we pretended to do homework but were really waging war on heart-breakers with colored pencils and a Windows XP computer.

But for now, in the universe of seventh-grade heartbreak, our vengeance was righteous.

Tomorrow, we’d return to school as if nothing had happened. Kyle was dead.

And Mei? Well, Mei would live.